



NIGERIAN JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

**EDUCATION, SECURITY, ECONOMY AND
VIABILITY OF DIGITAL RESPONSE**

VOLUME 33 NO. 1, OCTOBER, 2022

**ISSN: 0794-0114
e-ISSN: 2971-5652**

Published by

PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION ASSOCIATION OF NIGERIA (PEAN)

www.peanpapers.com

Formatted & Printed in Nigeria by



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Quality Education as a Panacea for Poverty Reduction in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper focused on Quality Education as a Panacea for Poverty Reduction in Nigeria. It aimed at enlightening the society about the viability of quality education in poverty reduction in Nigeria. It identified poverty as a threat to effective participation of individuals in the society so long as a big gap exists between individuals and their physiological needs. Moreover, the lack of basic human needs such as water, food, clothing, shelter, security etc is detrimental to human dignity. However, quality education becomes a dispensable tool to close that gap in order to restore human dignity though with emphasis on the commitments and provisional roles of stakeholders in education towards actualizing quality education. The paper enumerated some of the expected roles of stakeholders in education such as establishment of a comprehensive education system, built on merit and excellence rather than on quota system and federal character-related practices. It also pointed out the necessity of moral education, history, skills acquisition orientated subjects, hands-on teaching methods, teachers' periodic training and provision of functional health facilities, healthy and enabling environment and so on for both learners and teachers. Meanwhile, the paper stressed on the significance of poverty reduction in the society through provision of quality education to learners by the teachers, parents, and government. The paper opined that by-products of low quality education: low productivity, low income, low savings, low investment and poverty would automatically become the case of Nigerian society if quality education is not made imperative in Nigeria. Hence, recommendations that encourage the actualization of quality education in Nigeria were made. The paper concluded that teachers' activities, learners' concerns, and healthy teaching and learning environments among other variables alongside education stakeholders' commitments and efforts shall guarantee quality education, the fruit of which will be evidenced in the improved living standard of the society.

Key words: Nigeria, Education, Quality Education, Education Stakeholders, Poverty and Poverty Reduction

Introduction

Following the pronouncement of Education for All by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), great emphasis has been laid on the efficacy of education as a sustainable keystone of life.¹ Seen as an indispensable tool, education helps to build a just society for revamping of life. But there is more to education than being just 'for all'. The quality of education a nation offers to her citizens determines the degree of influence education has on her members. According to United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), quality education includes: Learners who are healthy, well-nourished and ready to participate and learn, and supported in learning by their families and communities; Environments that are healthy, safe, protective and gender-sensitive, and provide adequate resources and facilities; Content that is reflected in relevant curricula and materials for the acquisition of basic skills, especially in the areas of literacy, numeracy and skills for life, and knowledge in such areas as gender, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS prevention and peace; Processes through which trained teachers use child-centred teaching approaches in well-managed classrooms and schools and skilful assessment to facilitate learning and reduce disparities; Outcomes that encompass knowledge, skills and attitudes, and are linked to national goals for education and positive participation in society.² As a matter of fact, education cannot accord any quality to itself. The quality of education available for any society is dependent on the education stakeholders' commitments and efforts in relation to education system, curriculum, quality of teachers, infrastructures, instructional materials etc. Credibly, the adequacy or inadequacy of these mentioned variables affect the functionality of the individuals which education produces as well as the standard of living in the society. For instance, Fafunwa emphasized the need to maintain a training ground for teachers since their teaching skills impact on quality education.³ This confirms teaching affairs as one of the essential factors for quality education. Wherefore the stakeholders in education fail in their roles to ensuring quality education, the products of education are likely to be nothing short of inefficient persons. Moreover, the consequence of unproductive graduates of education usually manifests in unemployment, low productivity, low income, low savings, and low investment. These conditions breed poverty. Therefore, this paper will critically examine the place of quality education in improving the standard of living and poverty reduction in Nigeria.

Education

Education can be regarded as a fundamental route for getting enlightened and discovering life enhancing skills. Ukeje defined education as an activity that proceeds along laid down steps.⁴ According to him, the laid down steps involve the transmission of ideas, skills, culture and belief in the course of training the young through teaching and learning situation.⁵ This implies that education is a process that follows a definite pattern in preparing the child for good citizenship and productive life in the society. In the same vein, Peters defined education as the transmission of what is worthwhile to individuals, to make them knowledgeable and contributing members of the society.⁶ This definition directly gives credence to the notion Agusi, Ngwoke and Mbaji hold on education as an integral part of human existence that enlightens the society.⁷ In the opinion of Nwuzor and Ocho, education encompasses a process, a product and a discipline.⁸ As a process, it connotes the sequential stages involved in the upbringing of individuals spiritually, physical, intellectually, emotionally and socially. On the

other hand, education being a product implies the positive changes one receives and reflects in his daily interaction with his environment. Then, as a discipline, it is a body of accumulated knowledge and experiences designed to be learned by members of the society for the benefit of morals and effective achievement of their goals and aspirations.⁹ In affirmation, Ogonnaya opined that education unfolds not only the purposeful process of teaching and learning but, also the incidental experiences and random phenomena encountered by individuals, through different phases of life.¹⁰ Meanwhile, Dewey defined education as the “reconstruction and reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience and which increases the ability to direct the course of subsequent experiences.”¹¹ It is quite explicable that meaningful experiences through education can generate development and foster the wellbeing of the nation just as Abiogu concurs to the fact that education is a tool for national development.¹² In summary, education can be defined as a systematic activity that involves the transmission of worthwhile experiences, knowledge and skills that influence the development and future of individuals through teaching and learning. It can further be defined as an avenue through which members of a society acquire new knowledge, new skills, and new ideas that develop their mental, physical and social skills necessary to achieve better standard of living and gain national development.

Quality Education

Education is not a haphazard activity otherwise its objectives and goals may stand the risk of being thwarted. Education is expected to be a quality driven activity in a way that its components such as the curriculum, the teacher, the learner(s), and the environment are richly prepared for its delivery and goal attainment. The view of United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) for instance is that, quality education is synonymous to well-nourished learners readily supported to learn from the relevant curriculum through trained teachers using child-centred process in a healthy environment.¹³ Meanwhile, Glasser reckoned quality education from the perspective of change-driven system pointing out that, education systems are more likely to offer quality education to learners if they (systems) focus on the changes generated from continuous assessment of learners, learning environment, content, teaching processes, and the outcome.¹⁴ This idea of Glasser draws attention on the importance of supervision as means of checkmating poor delivery of education. In the thoughts of Rinehart, quality education examines the contemporary educational system and offers a compelling argument for how it can improve through the same strategies that are making industry more efficient, productive, and cost effective.¹⁵ He further opined that the prosperity of the future depends upon the focus of education today. By implication, if the repulsive economy of today can fully be addressed by a reconstructed and restructured education, poverty shall become less of an occurrence in time to come. In the same line of thought, quality education is perceived by Nielsen and Cumming as a means to transforming society,¹⁶ and this transformation can be envisaged in the opinion of Alleem who conceived quality education to be the biggest gift the society can give to the next generation.¹⁷ This notion of Alleem entails a wide range of apodictic commitment by educational authorities in the present time, in order to secure the future proficiency of learners.¹⁸ Operationally, quality education can be defined as a goal-oriented education sourced in relevant system, skilful teaching, healthy learners, and enabling environment. However, the quality of education must be adaptive to the nature of

challenges of education arising from new multinational researches, information and technology-based-evolution. For instance, in a world that is moved by technology, it would not be out of place if every quality-education-minded society explores and incorporate technology into their education systems especially in the areas of teaching and learning. Arguably, whereby the knowledge in teaching and learning is limited to the traditional pedagogy and content in negation of global best practices, the education of the given society will possibly remain inferior in quality.

Poverty

Etymologically, the word ‘poverty’ is traceable to the old French, modern French, and Latin words thus; *poverty*, *pauvrete*, and *paupertas* respectively, and they all mean ‘poor’ according to Skeat.¹⁹ Definitions of poverty depend on the context it is applied. According to Oxford dictionary by Hornby, poverty implies lacking sufficient money to live at a standard considered comfortable or normal in a society.²⁰ The United Nations (UN) gave fundamental meanings of poverty as the inability of having choices and opportunities; as a lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society; as not having enough to feed and clothe a family; as not having a school or clinic to go to; as lack of land on which food can be grown; as unavailability of job to earn a living; insecurity; powerlessness; vulnerability to violence; living in fragile environment like slum and ghetto without access to clean water and sanitation; as a violation of human dignity; and exclusion of individuals, families and communities from standard living.²¹ In the same vein, World Bank (WB) gave explicit definition of poverty as low level of income, health and education, and insufficient capacities and opportunity to better one’s life.²² From the foregoing, poverty can be defined as the aggregate subhuman conditions that pose threat to individual’s physiological needs, shelter, clothing, security, self-esteem and self-actualization. In further sense, poverty is a disturbing situation that impedes progress, generates panic, disrupts peace, and interferes in the rational abilities of human nature. It is therefore worrisome if a society cannot guarantee the basic needs of its people.

Poverty Reduction

Certainly, the state of poverty calls for a huge concern in order to improve access to basic needs. According to World Bank Group, poverty reduction means fighting poverty in all its dimensions.²³ This implies that poverty reduction aims at transforming the low life status of the people. It entails working towards fixing all the identified problems in the society through the tool of education, for the purpose of realizing a better society.

Necessity of Poverty Reduction in Nigeria

Often times, there seems a great deal of misguided priority in the administration of general affairs in Nigeria. Blaming the circumstance of poverty on other factors like urbanization, environmental pollution, unemployment, and insecurity of life and property and channelling of administrative concerns towards them is a typical example of misguided priority. If the claim by the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) that “education is an instrument for national development and social change”²⁴ is genuine, then, is it not justifiable to attribute the poor condition of Nigeria to education? Apparently, there is an alarming gap between theory and practice on educational affairs, and such gap harbours low productivity, low earnings, low savings and low investments which invariably gives rise to urbanization, messy surroundings,

unemployment, and crimes etc. These vices can have critical influence on the reasoning degree, analytical ability, inferences, and psychology of most people towards education. Be that as it may, there is need to tackle these vices starting from the root with the aim of revolutionizing the society. But what pragmatic means can pave way for the supposed transformation?

Role of Quality Education in Poverty Reduction in Nigeria

Role implies the contribution, responsibility or the functions assumed by or the part played by a thing or an individual in a given situation. Contextually, the role of quality education in poverty reduction has to do with the contribution of quality education in the amelioration of disturbing situation that hampers progress. It is of paramount importance to understand that this reduction role begins with the status of education itself because education is a wrap of all other variables. In other words, access to the other areas of life is intrinsic to a high quality of education. However, the questions now worthy of being explored could be; can quality education really be attained for poverty reduction to be accomplished in Nigeria? If yes, how then can this task be actualized? Arguably, the deliberation on the position of quality education in curbing the anomaly of poverty in the given society cannot be a mono concern. Such is bound to attract distinct responses with varied approaches from individuals. But for the purpose of this paper, the following basis will be tenaciously considered for quality education attainment in Nigeria.

The quality of education first begins with how relevant the system is to the needs and aspirations of the people. During planning, it is expected that educational objectives and aims should be determined by the basic things such as food, water, shelter, clothing, security, electricity, peaceful coexistence etc which every individual requires to live on and survive. Moreover, the objectives and aims of Nigerian education are not supposed to be held absolute instead, they are subject to be reviewed with the changing society. As affirmed by Brubacher thus “in a world rendered precarious and contingent by a compounding of the novel and the customary, educational aims must be held subject to revision as one advances into the future.”²⁵ The contemporary education system in Nigeria over the years has offered nothing remarkable to the entire society and so deserves to undergo an apt revision. However, this proposed update can be reflected by first revisiting existing practices such as federal character, quota system, and catchment area that have not been efficient in ‘character and moral development’ both in education and across. Subsequent to that, a comprehensive education system bearing intelligibly organized contents should be established. The contents which must include mandatory basic education among others have to be well planned to showcase curriculum, pedagogy, specialized-teachers employment by merit, teachers periodic training, payment of salary pattern, relevant teaching methods, supervision, construction and amendment of infrastructures like classrooms, laboratories, libraries, craft centres in the case of dilapidation, provision and replacement of instructional materials or learning tools, equity in admission, sanction in the sense of penalty, and possibly sound policies that will help improve the life of the poorest in Nigeria.

Brief explanation of some of the contents of the proposed revision can provide insights into quality education actualization. The curriculum known to be the subjects consisting of a course of study in a school needs unbiased attention as it has a direct influence on the ambition and

future of an individual. The emphasis lies on the inclusion of most relevant subjects, and restoration of those traditional subjects like History and Moral education that were practically ruled out for years. It is ironical to claim to 'develop individuals into morally sound, patriotic and effective citizens' as literally embedded in National Policy by FRN²⁶ whereas the same citizens are deprived of solid foundation. To give credence to this for instance, History equips learners with knowledge in retrospect while Moral education enlightens learners on the principles of right and wrong behaviour, and they significantly guide learners into the future. In addition, both are as essential as the idealists according to Enoh emphasized that curriculum should contain elements that enable learners to morally strengthen their relationship with the spiritual Order; to understand their physical environment, past events, people's culture and achievements; to develop vocational skills and intellectual skills; and to coexist in the society.²⁷

Primarily, teaching is expected to incorporate methods that will promote the development of learners' skills and forge them from the foundational level according to their natural strength and inclinations. At the end of basic education individuals are expected to emerge efficient in jointly solving societal problems against poverty. This is partly dependent on the teaching methods and teachers' competencies on handling curriculum-driven methods. For example, as the duration for basic education is nine (9) years and it requires an individual to become productive by the end of time, if learners are accurately followed up in teaching with regards to their different natural ascriptions (be it producing skill, warrior skill, or ruling skill) that is, employing the right methods (theoretical or practical) in teaching them, they will definitely leave school with super skills. Those with producing skill would provide for the need of the country. Such provision includes food, clothing, building etc. Those with warrior skill will ensure security of life and property, while the ruling skill bearers will study further for more intellectual abilities because the decision making, sound policy enactment and other vital provisions that regulate the activities of the entire society would rest on their shoulders. This warrants that teachers ought to be periodically trained and retrained with their teaching skills updated in order to ensure the suitable pedagogy that will make learners' learned behaviour and skills survive beyond classroom.

The necessity of teachers' periodic training can be seen in the argument of Fafunwa that no significant change in education can occur in any country except, on the grounds of adequate training and retraining of teachers.²⁸ This portrays teachers' teaching skills very needful for quality education. For instance, in the world of today where technology rules, every teacher is anticipated to become conversant with the use of educational-related-technology, such as multimedia. At this juncture, their technology knowledge, content knowledge, and pedagogy knowledge are to be interconnected in usage with respect to the curriculum. This will enable a continuous teaching and learning despite any unforeseen occurrence like the case of Covid 19 pandemic that restricted movement and physical contacts. Such multimedia tools include 'Visual Learning Tool' which is mostly needful for the education of individuals with hearing impairment (dumb) is used to show learners the picture of a concept under review. For instance, the use of digital picture showing fruits chart to teach the topic 'fruits and vegetables'; 'Audio Learning Tool' that especially serves the visually impaired individuals to learn effectively alongside others is the use of sound, narrators and recorders to render teaching services in order to retain learning. A common example is playing the sounds that animals make thus the goat

bleats and the bleating sound of a goat will be heard immediately etc; and 'Audio-Visual Learning' which is the application of both sounds and graphics to form practical movement (video) is used to demonstrate contents to learners within the classroom. For example, the use of tutorial video on 'house building' to teach learners the concept of 'division of labour and specialization' will broaden their scope of knowledge on Division of Labour and Specialization. With all these academic enhancing methods put in place for teachers, their own role will perhaps be guaranteed though not without adequate funding. Adequate funding makes it possible that virtually every component of the revised education system is implemented.

Peradventure the stakeholders in education consistently derail in their role of provision and commitments towards obtaining quality education, products of education can hardly turn out functional and reliant in providing the needs of the society. If that is the case, the goal of education which is to develop the nation cannot still be brought to fruition. Consequent upon that, the Nigerian society may probably remain in abject poverty where productivity rate will be low followed by poor income level which leads to little or no savings, resulting to low investment.

Significance of Poverty Reduction in Nigeria

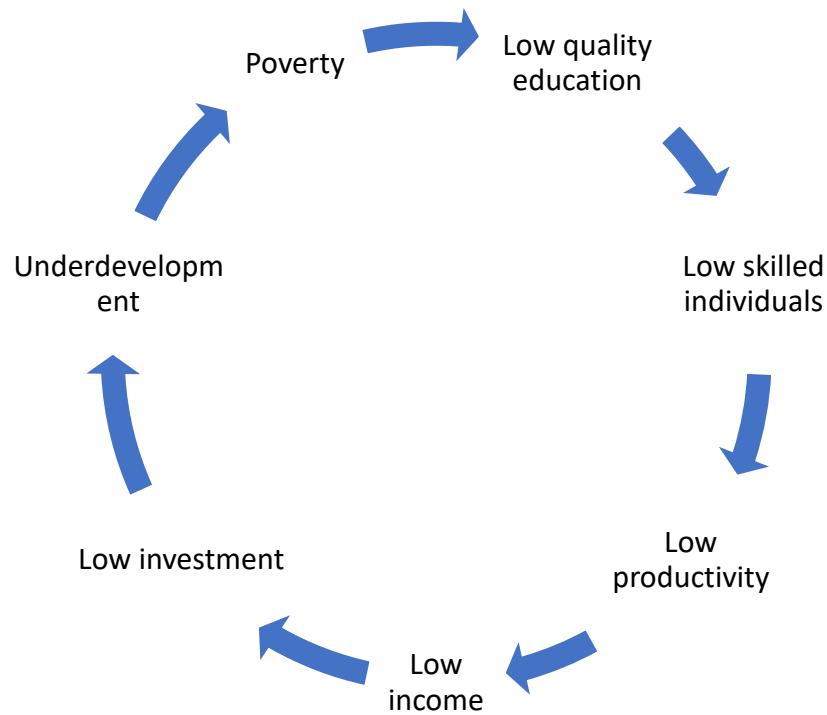
The amelioration of poverty following the actualization of quality education in Nigeria will be of practical benefit to learners, teachers, parents, education administrators, government and the whole society. The learners who probably have conceived disapproving mentality towards education due to their experiences of insufficient opportunities to better living may then embrace education. They will perceive education as a surest way to actualize their potentials, acquire knowledge, ideas and skills, as well as convert their ideas and dexterities into income-generating activities. Teachers on their own accord can be stable and confident enough to discharge their duties professionally as a result of the upgrade on their training and retraining pattern. Parents that have spontaneously forbidden or decided to withdraw their children from schooling on account of poor perception of education may come to bear a redirected impression towards education. That way, they will see positive changes in infrastructures, in teachers, in learners, and in administration and so hasten to avail their children the opportunity of being part of the retouched quality education. On the side of government, evidences on the tone of responses from the stakeholders of education will inspire government to resolve in maintaining high order vis-à-vis decision making and policy enactment in education. Government will also pay maximum attention to changing society in terms of innovation and foster means of incorporating any relevant technology, ideas or methods in the education system. The society is constituted by individuals and so, when the activities of the people are mostly in a just state, the environment whether urban or rural will be healthy. The various problems such as contaminated air, unavailability of pipe borne water, malnutrition, inadequate shelter and clothing, waste-disposal, epileptic power supply, unemployment, violence, crimes, and insecurity exacerbated by poverty will definitely be controlled. This perception is credible, because individuals exposed to quality education irrespective of their degree of education will contribute effectively to the production of societal needs through their different skills, continuously. At this juncture, there will be an even flow of economic activities in Nigeria.

Recommendations

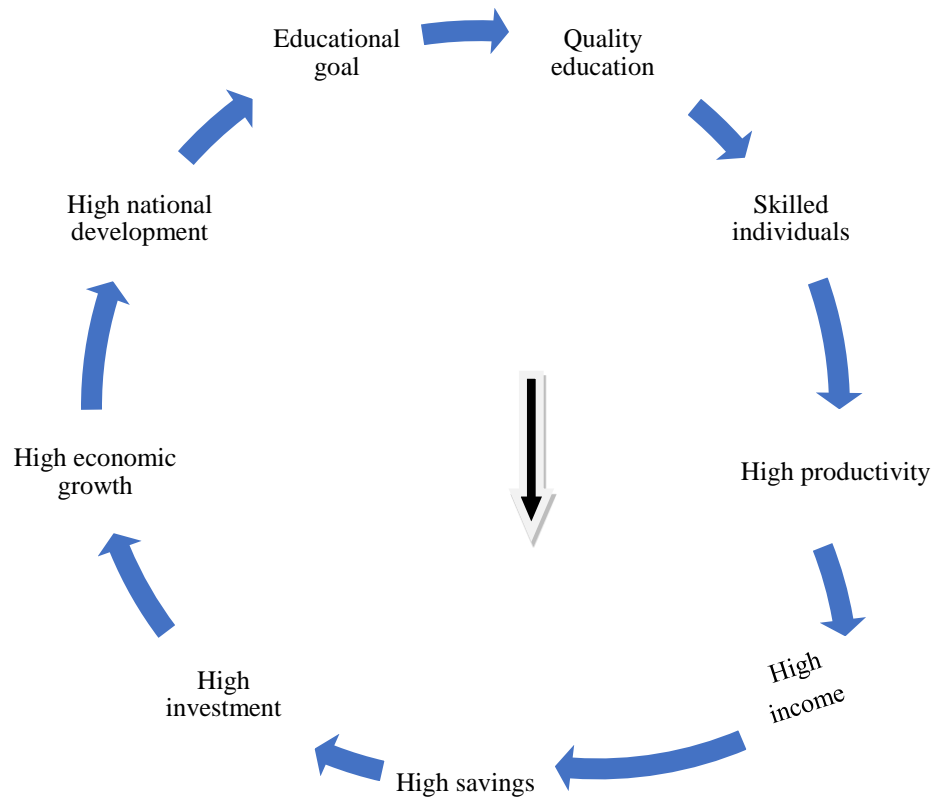
Based on the discussed issue, it is needful to direct some fundamental points herein to the Nigerian government and the education stakeholders for the purpose of societal transformation.

- Nigerian education policy should be anchored on pragmatic philosophy, a problem-solving education system – a system of education that is skill-oriented;
- Creating synergy between Nigerian education system and the needs of learners and the society;
- Ensuring that admission of learners into secondary, tertiary and professional courses such as medicine and surgery, medical sciences, engineering, education and so on is based on merit and not on quota system or federal character-related policies;
- In employment, preference should be given to teachers who are versed in skills, experience and national values;
- Inclusion of national values and moral education at all levels of education in Nigeria;
- Government should recognize the sensitive position of teachers in the society and as a matter of necessity, place them on good salary scale just as their counterparts in politics and medical fields etc;
- Compulsory periodic in-service training of teachers to update their content knowledge, pedagogy knowledge and technology knowledge, and appraise their competencies on the assigned subject areas should form part of Nigeria's education policy;
- Educators and education administrators should be monitored in their places of assignment to ensure their loyalty to work ethics and accountability;
- Maintenance of healthy learning environment through provision of adequate infrastructures and amenities at all levels of education in Nigeria;
- Provision of instructional materials and computer-based teaching and learning tools;
- Training of teachers on how to use and manipulate multimedia tools like Visual Learning Tool, Audio Learning Tool, Audio-Visual Learning, Texts and Animations;
- Assessment of learners' compliance on the use of technology-enabling learning aids like computer;
- Incorporation of relevant theoretical and practical teaching methods starting from basic education level; and
- Adequate provision and allocation of funds to education at all levels of education in Nigeria. However, if quality education is accomplished and the problem of poverty is remedied in Nigeria, the vicious cycle of poverty will then turn into what the paper coined as 'Gracious Cycle of Educational Goal'. This idea is illustrated in the diagram below;

Vicious Cycle of Poverty



Gracious Cycle of Educational Goal



Conclusion

This paper has highlighted the problems inherent in poverty in Nigeria. Leaving those problems uncontrolled will bring about persistence to devaluing education in the society, as most people have already lost hope on the efficacy of education as the key to a better living. However, such lost hope can be awakened if proper attention as recommended in this paper will be channelled to education at all levels of education in order to improve its quality. Among other variables, the authors emphasized the necessity of teachers' activities, learners' concerns, and healthy teaching and learning environments alongside education stakeholders' commitments and efforts in guaranteeing quality education in Nigeria. Hence, the results will be evidenced in improved living standard of the society.

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